

Case Study: PMRG Hazard Center San Diego

San Diego Office Tower Remains Flood-Free for 10 years with Leak Sensors

Don't underestimate water damage

As risks go, water damage is dangerously underestimated by property managers, according to Lisa Gualco, general manager for Hazard Center, a mixed use property including a 15-story high-rise and open-air retail center in San Diego.

"Water is just as bad as fire and sometimes it can be worse," Gualco says. "A fire is contained pretty quickly as smoke will set off an alarm. Water is a quiet threat. It can run over a weekend and nobody knows about it."

In truth, Gualco is speaking from horror stories she hears from other building managers as Hazard Center has not experienced a major flood in the high-rise office tower for more than a decade since she and her team installed wireless water leak sensors from The Detection Group. "I have an alarm for fire, why wouldn't I have an alarm for water?" she relates. "The water detection devices are part of our early warning system to prevent or at least minimize, damage."

Proactive and preventative

Hazard Center Office Tower, built in 1990, became an early adopter of water leak detection under Gualco's leadership in her position with PMRG, a leading real estate services firm based in Houston, Texas. "I believe in being proactive and

preventive and not waiting to do something as a result of disaster," she says, noting the inclination is partially personal, though mainly professional. "Because I'm in property management I'm supposed to be thinking ahead for my tenants, their job is to run their businesses. It's my job to make sure their building is in a condition that they can run their businesses without interruption," Gualco explains.

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~Lisa Gualco, General Manager, Hazard Center, PMRG





“I would never not have a water leak detection system in my building.”

~Bob Crowl, Chief Engineer, Hazard Center, PMRG

Wireless water leak detection

Close to 130 sensors from The Detection Group alert Hazard Center managers and staff when there is a leak in the building. According to customized preferences, the first call with the affected zone is delivered to security personnel on the ground floor. Calls or emails are then sent to other managers, including Hazard Center Chief Engineer, Bob Crowl, also with PMRG. “We have a quick response,” he reports. After receiving and listening to an alert on his phone, Crowl’s next call was to Building Security: “Usually, they are already investigating it and sometimes they already know what the cause was.”

Catching leaks immediately means water does not have time to seep into carpet and dry wall or spill into tenant spaces below.

In fact, by avoiding flood damage the cost comparison for prevention is minimal, according to Gualco. “It’s pennies on the dollar to have water leak detection in your building,” she says. “All you need is one slip, one thing to happen on a Friday night and not be discovered until Monday morning. You could have a decade or more of prevention cost in one flood.”

Speaking from more than 35 years of experience in facilities management, Crowl agrees. “I’ve experienced some pretty good disasters when it comes to floods,” he recalls. “Knowing what I know now, I would never not have a water leak detection system in my building. You need to look out for the assets of your tenants and owners. It’s the responsible thing to do.”

Proactive with Tenant Space

Installation of water sensors from The Detection Group are now a building standard and requirement for all tenant improvements in the office tower. Businesses readily accept the placement and price of units, worked into the quarterly common area maintenance fee or into improvement expenses. “They see that we’re proactive,” Gualco notes.

Instead of suffering water disasters that can create animosity between tenants and landlords, Hazard Center’s proactive stance saves heartache and encourages long-term tenancy, according to Gualco. “Flooding is an emotional thing for tenants and for me, especially when it impacts business,” she relates. “They all work very hard. I don’t like to see disruption in their lives.”

Hazard Center Office Tower serves as office space for thirty tenants, including credit and insurance companies, law firms, even a professional hockey team. Like any office building, water problems can occur with normal use—ice makers clog, toilets overflow, sink drains back up.

Working with The Detection Group, Hazard Center first installed flood sensors by drinking fountains on every floor, then in restrooms where water could flow into common areas or carpet. Though most of the fountains were later removed, the sensors were re-used along with new devices near other sources of water, including lines to refrigerators, sinks, hot water heaters, janitorial closets and more. Now, all Hazard Center office space in the tower—approximately 269,000 square feet in total—is protected by The Detection Group.

